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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000969

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEMOCRACY YEMENI STYLE: TIDBITS FROM THE AFTERMATH

REF: SANAA 955

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Despite several irregularities in post-election procedures, the assessment of the April 27 elections remains generally positive, even among the opposition. Observers express concern that the make-up of the new parliament, with its overwhelming General People's Party (GPC) majority and fairly inexperienced members, will weaken the institution. Other observers point to a united opposition and the power of the expected Speaker of Parliament as factors that will serve to strengthen it. Several prominent figures gained seats. The new government is expected to be formed by mid-May. End Summary.

Negotiating the Results;
Assessment Still Generally Positive

¶2. (U) As of May 5, four seats remain undecided. These seats may go into by-elections. The results are the following:

GPC	225
Islah	45
YSP	7
Independents	14
Baathists	2
(pro-Syrian)	
Nasserites	3
Undecided	4
GPC/Islah (al-Ahmar)	1

¶3. (U) In typical Yemeni political style, several unresolved constituencies are undergoing or completed high-level "backroom" negotiation towards resolution rather than going through the election-law mandated legal procedures. For example, reliable sources indicate that President Saleh and the GPC offered the Islah party five seats in exchange for conceding one seat in Sanaa won by Islah -- the so-called "unity constituency" where the President voted. The Islah party reportedly turned the offer down. Many political observers cannot understand the candidate selection process in this important symbolic constituency (#11). The GPC ran al-Masawari, a close associate of Saleh whose tenure as Mayor of Sanaa was so marked by perceptions of corruption that the joke on election day went "vote for al-Masawari, or else he will go back to running the capital."

¶4. (U) Several pro-government and pro-opposition journalists told Pol/Econoff May 3 that despite the reported manipulations of the counting process, they still believe that these elections are a milestone in Yemen's democratic development. They agreed unanimously with NDI's assessment (ref), highlighting the report's balance of positive and negative developments. While some members of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) have called for some form of action to protest the results, including a boycott of parliament, most observers do not believe the JMP will chance losing their platform in parliament.

¶5. (U) The JMP held a press conference May 5 (covered by national and international press) and announced that it would not withdraw from parliament, as some JMP members had threatened. However, during the press conference, representatives from the Islah and Nasserite parties challenged President Saleh directly, accusing him of meddling in the election and calling upon him to act as a "unifying" force rather than a party leader. President Saleh tends to command widespread deference, and this direct challenge represents a departure from the support he usually receives across party lines.

¶6. (C) The editor-in-chief of the Islah party newspaper al-Sahwah, Nabil al-Sufi (please protect), said May 3 that his assessment was mostly positive. He noted high turnout, an organized and modern campaign, vastly improved election administration and Islah's high-profile wins in Sanaa (10 of 19 constituencies) as positive developments that show "democracy works" in Yemen. He said that while the violations were troubling, it was "to be expected" in a

developing democracy and he looked ahead to the next elections (local council and presidential in 2006) with optimism.

Parliament Possibly Weakened;
Lots of New (and Old) Faces

¶17. (U) Some political observers lament the number of brand-new politicians to the ranks of parliament, expressing concern that the relatively less-educated and inexperienced members will weaken the parliament. While the GPC overwhelming majority may also serve to weaken parliament's oversight of the government, close cooperation among opposition parties and the power wielded by the veteran Speaker of Parliament, Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, should provide a counter-balance. Also, as noted by the GPC political director Mohamed Qubaty on May 5, the lack of complete party unity within the GPC affects the ability of the government to pass legislation. Often, other considerations, such as tribal or regional interests, play a larger role than party affiliation.

¶18. (U) Among the "new blood" are several sons of prominent political figures, including Dr. Rashad al-Alimi (son of the Minister of Interior), Sadiq Ameen Abu Ras (son of the Minister of Local Administration) and Ali Hassan al-Shater (son of a close aide to Saleh and the Editor-in-Chief of September 26 weekly newspaper).

¶19. (U) None of the seven Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) winners have parliamentary experience, nor are they from the party's known current senior leadership. However, the only YSP member from the 1997 parliament (who ran independent during the boycott) may still gain a seat, because his constituency remains under dispute and observers report he was leading the vote.

¶10. (C) Two of Post's most useful contacts in the outgoing parliament, Sultan al-Barakani (Chairman of the GPC bloc) and Nabil Basha (Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee), retained their seats. Both have played effective roles in the parliament's ratification of a number of international conventions related to counter-terrorism.

¶11. (C) Among the more infamous of winners, the GPC former governor of Sanaa and Marib, Naji al-Sufi, won a seat in Sanaa governorate. He is known for his flagrant violations of human rights while he was serving as governor of Sanaa, as noted in the 2000 Human Rights Report, including violations such as attacking judges, arbitrarily arresting citizens and maintaining a private prison.

Family Affair -- the al-Ahmars

¶12. (U) Five members of the al-Ahmar family gained seats in parliament. Sheikh al-Ahmar, widely expected to resume his post as Speaker of Parliament, is now joined by four of his sons. Two are from Islah and two are from GPC, while Sheikh al-Ahmar was elected with the support of both parties. This result is more evidence of how family and tribal ties often trump political party ties in Yemeni politics. Some joke that the al-Ahmar bloc alone rivals that of the YSP with its seven members.

Government Formation

¶13. (U) The parliament will meet on May 10, and observers estimate that a new government will be formed by May 15. Details reported septel.

HULL